

Cat's claw creeper

Dolichandra unguis-cati

Family

Bignoniaceae (trumpet creeper)

Also known as

Macfadyena unguis-cati

Where is it originally from?

Central and South America

What does it look like?

Perennial vine with long stems (<15 m or more), often rooting at the nodes, and an extensive root system, producing large tubers from which individual climbing runners grow. Two leaflets and a three-clawed tendril grow from each leaf stalk, the hooked tendrils are used to climb supports. Juvenile plants have small leaflets (10-20 mm x 4-8 mm) and mature leaflets are narrowly egg-shaped (5-16 cm x 1-7 cm) with both surfaces sparsely clad in scales. Clusters of 1-3 (or <15) large, tubular yellow flowers (4-8 cm long) are followed by dry, black, flattened seed capsules that are tapered at both ends (<95 cm x 1-2 cm) and contain winged seeds (1-2 cm x 4-6 cm).

Why is it weedy?

Grows vigorously into the forest canopy, produces abundant seed, is difficult to control, and can grow in a wide range of conditions, including drought.

How does it spread?

Seeds are wind-spread. A network of root tubers develop from stems touching the ground, with each tuber producing more runners, allowing the plant to form a progressively larger and denser mat on the forest floor.

What damage does it do?

Climbs standing vegetation, smothering native trees and shrubs. It can cause the death of large canopy trees through a combination of weight and shading. It can smother the ground with a thick layer of runners, preventing native species establishing.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

Riparian areas, forest and shrubland edges, and light gaps. It prefers fertile, well drained soils, but appears to tolerate most soil types.

What can I do to get rid of it?

1. Hand pull or dig out small plants (all year round): Small infestations only, ensuring removal of all stems, roots and tubers. Dispose of all plant material at a refuse transfer station.
2. Cut and paint stumps (spring-summer): Cut vines near the base and paint the cut stump with glyphosate (undiluted). Leave the vine in the canopy to die, ensuring no vines are touching the ground. Regrowth from stumps can be sprayed with glyphosate (20ml/L + penetrant).
3. Overall spray (spring-summer): Use for ground layer carpets of vines, glyphosate (20ml/L + penetrant).

What can I do to stop it coming back?

Monitor the site and treat any regrowth.



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Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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